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AMBS window

Tailored to fit: *Invite AMBS* program customizes resources for the church

Congregations and organizations are learning directly from AMBS faculty members on a topic of their choice through the [Invite AMBS](#) program — both in person and virtually.

“I see Invite AMBS as an answer to the requests we’re receiving from congregations to receive education from AMBS and to be in partnership with us,” said [Steve Norton](#), who oversees the program for AMBS’s Church Leadership Center. “Invite AMBS is the most direct way this can happen, since faculty members go directly to the churches or conference gatherings.”

The requests come in different forms, Norton said. Invite AMBS speakers have preached for individual congregations, served as plenary presenters for conference gatherings and offered customized workshops or seminars for specific groups. Those who inquire decide which topics they want input on or make suggestions based on their needs, and Norton matches them with a faculty member with knowledge of the subject.

Requests for speaking engagements have come from across the U.S. and Canada, he said: “The program is clearly resonating with churches and conferences, as we’re seeing faculty members continually receive requests.”

Two groups who engaged Invite AMBS speakers in 2021 share about their experiences here:

Antiracism ministry consulting

Faculty member: Nekeisha Alayna Alexis,

MA, Intercultural Competence and Undoing Racism coordinator

Chrissie Muecke, Rochester (New York) Mennonite Fellowship (RMF):

Our congregation began as a house church in the mid-1970s and has about 50 members.

While we now have a building, we maintain elements of a house church. The “priesthood of all believers” is a core value of the fellowship, leading to the decision not to have a pastor. The work of the church is carried out by ministry groups formed each year through a gift pledge process.

We established an antiracism accountability group in the summer of 2020 following the death of George Floyd. This group of eight people attended protests and rallies, wrote letters and statements in response to local and national racism and violence, [\(continued on p. 2\)](#)

“We realized that much of what we had been doing was reactionary and not sustainable. We needed a more comprehensive plan so that the work would be lasting.”

Above: Invite AMBS speakers Nekeisha Alayna Alexis (Credit: Peter Ringenberg) and Drew Strait (Credit: Mennonite Church USA)

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facilitated worship services and adult education groups around issues of racism, and coordinated a churchwide retreat led by Nekeisha via Zoom called "Becoming the People We Want to Be." We connected with local organizations to learn more about their work. We met weekly for prayer, discernment, sharing and discussion.

After several months, we realized that much of what we had been doing was reactionary. There would be an incident of violence or police brutality, and we would quickly do something in response.

We knew that this was not sustainable and that we needed a more comprehensive plan so that the work would be lasting. We also recognized that focusing a lot of attention outside of ourselves did not address the racism and White supremacy that existed within our mostly White congregation. That's when we invited Nekeisha to work with us.

A grant from the Mennonite Church USA Justice Fund helped pay for our work with her.

We had four two-hour Zoom sessions with Nekeisha, which she developed based on the goals we outlined for her. She provided pre-work in the form of articles, reflection questions and writing prompts for us to complete. She made significant shifts along the way in response to what came up. For example, we originally asked her to facilitate a session about using money in antiracism work, but we discovered it was more important to first address our relationship to the rest of the fellowship. While our group was very enthusiastic and committed, we sometimes moved too quickly for the rest of the congregation and did not communicate clearly and effectively.

During our time with Nekeisha, we developed vision and mission statements to guide our work as a committee, identified roles and tasks to help our group run more effectively, and developed a series of short- and long-term goals for our work.

We worked through interpersonal challenges that arose in our small group and with the congregation. We went through a process to change the bylaws of the church so that an antiracism ministry is now one of the permanent ministry groups. We facilitated conversations for the congregation to discuss ways racism shows up in our own lives and in our church.

Going forward, we want to "transform inside" and "engage outside," to use Nekeisha's wording. Our antiracism ministry group will meet monthly to continue making progress toward our goals. We are hiring an antiracism trainer to do some further training with our entire church. We are reviewing all manuals and policies in the church using an antiracist lens. Nekeisha provided several assessment tools to help us identify positive changes we are making and areas we still need to address.

We plan to join the Rochester Police Accountability Board and help address local issues around policing and violence. We want to deepen our connection with Teen Empowerment, a local organization that hires youth organizers to help build strong communities and work on policy initiatives for institutional and systemic change. The teens created a documentary called *Clarissa Uprooted* about an African American area of

(continued on p. 5)

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Editors: Annette Brill Bergstresser,
Melissa Troyer
Designer: Rachel A. Fonseca

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
3003 Benham Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46517, USA
574.295.3726 • contact@ambs.edu

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Invite AMBS: Schedule a speaker

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SAMPLE TOPICS

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Learn more: ambs.edu/invite

Equipping leaders to meet the challenges of ministry

Some years ago, I was riding with a group of people in the covered bed of a pickup in Venezuela. As the pickup pulled to a stop, I said to one of my traveling companions, "I wonder where we are?" — to which she replied, "I guess we are *somewhere!*" That exchange has been a running joke between us over the years. We are surely always *somewhere*.

AMBS is a creative, student-centered and hope-filled learning community. We know that wherever leaders find themselves, they will be leading *somewhere*. And when has it been more challenging to make sense of the "somewhere" we find ourselves today? Today, pastors plan worship, offer pastoral care and lead discernment processes through entirely new media. Peacebuilders do their work in highly polarized contexts. Congregations are returning to in-person meetings wondering who is coming back.

The faithful church bears relevant witness to Jesus in every place we find ourselves. At AMBS, we are listening deeply to church leaders in the U.S., Canada and around the world. They are telling us that AMBS offers an excellent foundation for ministry and leadership. Yet today, more is being asked of these leaders.

We are working hard to support leaders in this time and place. These times are requiring leaders to expand their administrative and organizational skills. Leaders are expected to manage polarized

communities as they discern a common sense of purpose with these communities.

Through **Invite AMBS**, our faculty members are helping leaders assess and respond to challenges they face in their ministry contexts, whether it is increasing secularization in a post-Christendom context, rising Christian nationalism or systemic racism (see pp. 1, 2 and 5).

AMBS is developing a new **applied leadership curriculum** — a series of learning modules that will be delivered in multiple, flexible ways to provide practical skills and processes to meet the challenges current and future leaders are and will be facing.

We have also submitted a petition to our accrediting agency to offer a competency-based **Doctor of Ministry in Leadership** that will enable experienced leaders to deepen their formation and expand their skillset for greater effectiveness.

Our aim at AMBS is to educate highly effective leaders to meet the challenges of ministry with a relevant witness that makes a difference in every place. ● — *David Boshart, PhD, President*



Credit: Jason Bryant

Thank you to our board members!

The AMBS Board of Directors includes representatives from the seminary's sponsoring denominations (Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada) and other constituencies. We recognize and thank our outgoing board members for contributing their time, experience and expertise:

- **Bruce Baergen** of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (board member 2008–12; chair 2012–22); First Mennonite Church of Edmonton; Mennonite Church Alberta
- **David Brubacher** (MDiv 1991) of Vineland, Ontario, Canada (2012–22); Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ontario; Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

We welcome and thank our incoming members:

- **Rev. Addie Banks** of the Bronx, New York (2022–26); Manhattan (New York) Mennonite Fellowship; Atlantic Coast Conference
- **Peter Goerzen** (MDiv 2015) of North Newton, Kansas (2022–26); Tabor Mennonite Church, Newton; Western District Conference

View a list of AMBS's board members: ambs.edu/board



Bruce Baergen



David Brubacher



Rev. Addie Banks



Peter Goerzen

Meet our Journey graduates!

Six participants from Mennonite Church USA congregations completed the **Journey Missional Leadership Development Program** in 2021. The distance-friendly certificate program develops leaders centered in Jesus Christ for ministries in local churches and communities. It's designed for pastors, those exploring a call to ministry, church planters and lay leaders.

The program — which consists of online study, biweekly meetings with a mentor, and face-to-face gatherings — currently has 18 participants in the U.S., Canada, Southeast Asia and Uganda.

"I'm deeply impressed by our Journey graduates' hunger for learning, wholehearted investment in ministries of various kinds in their churches and communities, and growth in many different areas — including spiritual disciplines, Bible study and theology, personal character, leadership and more," said **Jewel Gingerich Longenecker**, PhD, Dean of Lifelong Learning. "Their commitment to God and the church, together with their development during the Journey program, are truly inspiring!"



Jan Croyle, Wadsworth, Ohio.

Jan had been an accountant for 35 years and felt God was calling her to something more. Through her experience with the program, she is now Pastor at her congregation, First Mennonite Church

in Wadsworth (Central District Conference).

Her mentor was **Marilyn Rossiter** of Summit Mennonite Church (Ohio Conference).

"When I began this program, I had no idea what God had planned for me. I ended my Journey program not simply with a piece of paper, but with a whole new world opened for me to truly experience and say 'yes' to the Spirit's call. I have been the pastor [at Wadsworth] now for over a year, and I can't imagine doing anything else."



Hilarion Chidi Ihezuoh, Los Angeles, California.

Chidi is an ordained pastor serving with Mosaic Mennonite Conference. His mentor was **Anthonia Onye** of Los Angeles Faith Chapel (Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference).

"Jewel and the staff and instructors (Duane Beck, Roland Kuhl and Donna Mast) are amazing. A thrilling thing with my instructors is that they

have continued to provide support for me even after I finished the program. Journey is a key requirement for building your spiritual formation and direction as a pastor. It provides a platform in knowing the roots of the Anabaptists, teaches you a lot about the Bible and provides you with the right approach for pastoral care."



Jolene Miller, Roanoke, Illinois. Jolene applied for Journey in 2018, immediately after joining the pastoral team of Roanoke Mennonite Church in Eureka, Illinois, as Pastor of Worship and Community Life. She anticipates her ordination

process with Illinois Mennonite Conference beginning soon. Her mentor was **Jane Roeschley** of the Mennonite Church of Normal (Illinois Mennonite Conference).

"I cannot overstate Journey's value in equipping me to grow the Kingdom in my little corner of the world. I was repeatedly amazed at how God worked through well timed lessons to equip me at just the right time for new tasks and responsibilities as they occurred. Journey was crucial in equipping me for ministry, as well as helping me develop and claim my pastoral identity."



Ellen M. Morey, Elkhart, Indiana. Ellen is an elder at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart (Indiana-Michigan Mennonite

Conference), and is exploring involvement with the Hermitage Community. She is also a pro-

duction seamstress. Her mentors were **Dr. Sally Longley** and **Eleanor Kreider** of Prairie Street and **Nina Bartelt Lanctot**, a spiritual director.

"In Journey, I experienced the movement of G-d* in ways that surprised me and brought new life into my faith. Overall, coming out of the program, I have a greater awareness of the movement of the Spirit and greater compassion for myself as I strive towards the goal of integration with the larger body of Christ. [*G-d is a respectful way to refer to the Divine.]"

Not pictured: Raymond (Andrew) Arnold of Family Mennonite Church, Los Angeles, California (Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference); **Jeremy Clevenger** of Wooster (Ohio) Mennonite Church (Ohio Conference) ●

(continued from p. 2)

Rochester that once thrived but was displaced. We hope to screen the film for the community.

Our work with Nekeisha was invaluable. She brought energy, passion and wisdom to our meetings. Her in-depth presentations were insightful and tailored to our specific needs. She created a safe, yet challenging space for honest reflection. We came away with both motivation and tools for continuing this essential work.

Nekeisha, on working with RMF: This group went from not having a clear sense of their mission at the start to being commissioned for their ministry by their congregation. So many people get interested in antiracism and then get stuck, or get fired up and then move on to the next thing. It's heartening to know that there is a committed group of people who have overcome that hump to enter into another phase of acting.

If you're stuck in your privilege, you're not going to be able to get out of it without help. It's like if I don't know how to bake. If I sit around in a circle with others who don't know how to bake a cake, how will we learn to bake a cake together? It's important to get support. I want people to see that every step forward is a win.

“The Bible and Christian Nationalism” presentation

Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) 2021 Fall Assembly Celebration

Faculty member: Drew Strait, PhD, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins

Brook Musselman, ACC Conference Coordinator, Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Atlantic Coast Conference is made up of 30 congregations from Boston to Baltimore, clustered mainly around Lancaster and Reading. The conference is made of and strengthened by congregations at all points of the theological spectrum that vary greatly in their practices and styles but find common ground in being centered in Christ. One of ACC's weaknesses is its lack of much racial diversity, being primarily White congregations.

An ACC pastor returned from Mennonite Church USA's 2021 convention recommending that we invite Drew — whose workshop on “The Bible and Christian Nationalism” was timely and well received — to share at our Fall Assembly. Christian nationalism is something that

quite a few ACC congregations are wrestling with in some way, and we felt the resourcing would be appreciated by pastors.

Our main goal was to resource pastors who are unsure how to address Christian nationalism in their congregations. We had an informal breakfast with Drew and ACC pastors so they could ask questions and interact with Drew on the topic. He then presented two sessions during the assembly gathering.

A major takeaway for many participants was a clear connection between religious and political idolatry. Drew's action points for interrupting this connection when we see it were very appreciated. He helped participants move towards being comfortable with truth-telling without being hypercritical. Hearing from someone who is an expert on the subject matter was helpful for many who have felt discomfort with what they've been experiencing in their communities but didn't have the tools to respond.

At this point ACC is not planning any next steps, but our hope is that this learning is being shared and presented in congregations and that individuals will use the tools in their contexts. The recordings of Drew's sessions have been shared through ACC communications channels.

Drew, on working with ACC: The proliferation of White Christian nationalism around the U.S. has presented pastors and congregations with new challenges for bearing witness to the gospel of peace. The divisive nature of our political moment has divided families and even congregations. While much has been written about what Christian nationalism is, finding safe spaces for pastors to talk about what to do are lacking. My time with ACC pastors deepened this conviction as we shared our corporate wisdom with one

another and reflected theologically on how — *biblically speaking* — Christian nationalism distorts the gospel of Christ and is a form of political idolatry. ●

Drew helped participants move towards being comfortable with truth-telling without being hypercritical.



Credit: Peter Ringenberg

Above: Drew Strait; Nekeisha Alayna Alexis

Political Idolatry: Countering Christian Nationalism webinar

Watch for information to come on this May 2022 webinar with Drew Strait.

2021 Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition Fred Speckeen and Leonard Wiebe



(l. to r.): Fred Speckeen and Leonard Wiebe

Frederick J. Speckeen, PhD, of Prince George, British Columbia, Canada, and **Leonard Wiebe**, MST, of Goshen, Indiana, are the 2021 recipients of AMBS's Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition. Both of them earned Bachelor of Divinity

degrees from the seminaries that later joined to become AMBS — Speckeen from Goshen Biblical Seminary in 1956 and Wiebe from Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 1960.

"We were impressed by the rich service that Fred and Leonard have given over their lifetimes — Fred in administrative leadership and Leonard as a pastor and church planter," said Alumni

Director **Janeen Bertsche Johnson** (MDiv 1989). "We hope their stories inspire others to see seminary education as a vital gift for whatever professional path they may take."

Speckeen said the dedication of the GBS faculty and staff to its students, the Mennonite Church and the community impressed him: "Their Christ-centeredness and servant leadership were inspiring and motivated me as I later took on responsibilities in the church and community — locally and internationally."

Wiebe reflected, "I always felt that the seminary encouraged us and was very close to whatever we were doing in church planting. ... There was a real caring for each person and a strong sense of prayer in the school that helped us and gave us the support we needed."

Read more, view the reception recordings and/or nominate a graduate for the 2022 award: ambs.edu/alumni • — *Annette Brill Bergstresser*

Featuring faculty scholarship on pressing issues for the church

At the **Institute of Mennonite Studies** (IMS), the research and publishing wing of AMBS, we collaborate with Anabaptist scholars from across North America and around the world through our publishing partnerships.

We publish *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* in partnership with Canadian Mennonite University; the mission journal *Anabaptist Witness* in partnership with Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Mission Network; and the book series *Studies in Anabaptist Theology and Ethics* in partnership with T&T Clark/Bloomsbury; to name a few.

A recent collaboration featured Anabaptist scholars close to home. Through a special arrangement with *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* (MQR) — a joint publication of Goshen (Indiana) College, the Mennonite Historical Society and AMBS — IMS co-edited the January 2022 issue of MQR, which features the cutting-edge scholarship of several AMBS faculty members.

Rachel Miller Jacobs, DMin, Associate Professor of Congregational Formation, opens the issue by reflecting

on ordinary harm and how to atone for it. **Jamie Pitts**, PhD, Associate Professor of Anabaptist Studies and IMS Director, then explores the relationship between the Holy Spirit and institutions. **Drew Strait**, PhD, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins, deconstructs the ideology of White Christian nationalism and calls the church to resist political idolatry. **Janna Hunter-Bowman**, PhD, Associate Professor of Peace Studies and Christian Social Ethics, likewise proposes ways Christians can engage the state in peace-building without idolizing the state.

You can read these articles and more by purchasing a print or digital copy at goshen.edu/mqr. To learn more about IMS's other publishing partnerships, see ambs.edu/ims. •

— *David Cramer, PhD, IMS Managing Editor*



David Cramer, PhD,
IMS Managing Editor

Credit: Peter Ringenberg

AMBS welcomes Wyse-Rhodes to Teaching Faculty

The AMBS Board of Directors has appointed **Jackie Wyse-Rhodes**, PhD, of Bluffton, Ohio, as Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible, beginning in July 2022. She currently is Associate Professor of Religion at Bluffton University, where she has served since 2015, teaching courses on the Old and New Testaments, biblical interpretation, exegetical studies, and Greek and Hebrew, among other topics. She also served as Interim Campus Pastor (2020–21).

Beverly Lapp, EdD, Vice President and Academic Dean and search committee chair, said she sees Wyse-Rhodes' experience in an ecumenically diverse Mennonite liberal arts university as "an enormous asset for our learning community."

"During Jackie's campus interview, students and faculty members observed how she created a spacious and interactive learning environment that makes room for others to engage, learn and lead," she noted. "I'm thrilled that with her Bible faculty colleagues, Jackie will be part of continuing AMBS's incredible legacy of dynamic biblical scholarship and teaching."

A 2002 AMBS graduate, Wyse-Rhodes earned a PhD in Hebrew Bible in 2018 from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Her dissertation was titled, "Reading the Cosmos in Second Temple Jewish Literature: Nature as Model, Sign,

Punishment, Witness, and Mystery."

She also earned a Master of Research in Hebrew Bible from Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, in 2007, while serving as a community worker in the Netherlands with Mennonite Mission Network (2002–07). Her Master of Divinity at AMBS included a concentration in Biblical Studies, and she also earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Hiram (Ohio) College in 1997.

An active scholar, presenter and speaker, Wyse-Rhodes is currently writing *Numbers* for the Believers Church Bible Commentary series (Herald Press) and "Isaiah and the Environment" for the Bible Odyssey website (Society of Biblical Literature). "Land," her contribution to *The Bible and Science Fiction* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2022), is forthcoming.

Wyse-Rhodes is excited to rejoin the AMBS community: "During my candidating visit, I was drawn to the joyful curiosity that faculty and students bring to study and worship, and I was impressed by the ease with which the seminary builds community among students on campus and at a distance. I'm eager to join in the wonderful work AMBS is doing to pursue God's vision of healing and hope for all creation." ●

— Annette Brill Bergstresser



Jackie Wyse-Rhodes, PhD

Photo provided

McOwen concludes nearly 20 years of service

Dee McOwen, Administrative Assistant to the Registrar and Education Database Manager, retired Dec. 31, 2021, concluding nearly 20 years of service to AMBS. Since she began in July 2002, McOwen has played a crucial role behind the scenes, working steadfastly to ensure the accuracy of the seminary's student records. **Scott Janzen**, MDiv, Assistant Dean and Registrar and Director of Retention, described her as a "cornerstone — solidly preserving the integrity of the Registrar's Office."

He noted that McOwen spearheaded the transitions in software used by the Registrar's Office not once but twice — managing the monumental changes from paper- and DOS-based student record systems to a Windows system in 2005 and to cloud-based software in 2016. He also praised McOwen's and volunteer **Dot Smucker's** "tireless efforts to carefully audit student records from decades past and bring them up to par."

"Those are really big jobs that go on mostly behind the scenes, but which are really important," he said.

What has struck Janzen most about McOwen, though, is that more than anything else, she strives to serve students well.

"She has connected with students closely throughout the years and helped them both on campus and off," he said. "She is a great listener, and someone students appreciate speaking with. And when they would sometimes apologize for interrupting her work, she would say, 'It's no problem at all; we're here to serve students, and you come first.' For me, that is the anthem of her legacy at AMBS." ● — Annette Brill Bergstresser



Dee McOwen and Scott Janzen during a campus break in honor of her retirement.

Credit: Rachel A. Fonseca

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Carmen Gomez, Master of
Divinity Connect student
from the Bronx, New York

UPCOMING OFFERINGS

!Explore:

A Theological Program for High School Youth

Participants in 2022 will attend Mennonite World Conference in Indonesia with Indonesian youth, explore theological questions and lived faith together, and visit parts of beautiful Java Island. This program for students in grades 10–12 includes a congregational internship. Generous financial support helps with MWC expenses, and participants receive a \$1,000 stipend. Tap a shoulder! ams.edu/explore

Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication

April 20 – May 31: Explore the possibilities and pitfalls of courageously engaging differences within congregational life in this six-week online Anabaptist Short Course with Betty Pries, PhD. Register by March 16 to save \$50! ams.edu/shortcourses

Journey:

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Nurture your leadership abilities, deepen your spiritual formation and explore what ministry looks like in your life through this two-and-a-half-year nondegree distance-friendly program. ams.edu/journey

Free journals online

- *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 22.2 (Fall 2021): “Reading the Bible as if our lives depend on it” ams.edu/ims/vision
- *Anabaptist Witness* 8.2 (October 2021): “Mission and Protest” anabaptistwitness.org

Anabaptists & Philosophy Roundtable

This new webinar series features scholars discussing Anabaptist life and thought in relation to philosophical themes, topics and methods. ams.edu/anabaptists-and-philosophy-roundtable

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ams.edu/costs-and-affordability